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New Haven Public Schools

Testimony on HB 7027

An act concerning the State budget for the biennium ending June 30, 2019

February 23, 2017

Dear Senators Gerratana, Somers, Osten, and Formica and Representatives Dillon and Walker,

On behalf of our students, families, and staff of New Haven Public Schools, I urge you to consider the devastating impact that further cuts to School Based Health Centers would have on the health, learning and wellbeing of thousands of our most vulnerable students in New Haven. Below is a summary of how the most the recent cuts in the past 2 years have affected our SBHCs and we will simply have no choice but to start closing SBHCs if any more cuts happen this year.

SBHCs also have a significant impact on reducing chronic absenteeism by preventing and addressing health issues that commonly cause absenteeism.

We are requesting your full support to vote against any further cuts to the School Based Health Centers and to preserve the current funding.

We also invite and encourage you to visit one of our SBHCs in NHPS soon, and would happily give you a tour and introduce you to our dedicated clinicians and the students we serve so you can experience first-hand the differences we are able to make in the lives and health of our students every day. They deserve and depend on these services, and for many children, the SBHC is the only healthcare they receive.

- School based health centers are one of the *most effective* ways to keep students healthy and attending school so they can be healthy, successful learners. They provide students with immediate access to care for many serious physical and mental health issues that impact their health, attendance and school performance.
- SBHCs are THE ONLY reliable “safety nets” for all of our students and extend beyond health care services--they advocate for health, social, housing, and legal services for families. SBHCs give students access to health/mental health and dental services regardless of insurance or documented status, or ability to pay--No student is turned away!
- In the last 4 years, *visits to SBHCs for mental health services have increased by 11%*; from 30% of all visits to 41% of all visits. The need for mental health treatment continues to increase while the cuts reduce available services.
- Among our 17 SBHCs, from just September -December 2016, our clinicians have provided 5,890 medical visits and 2,644 mental health visits. Of those, students were returned to class 97% of the time.
- Mental Health Services provided in our SBHCs have been shown to impact our students by:
 - Reducing internalizing (sadness, anxiety) and externalizing symptoms (arguing, fighting)
 - Increasing coping skills and stress management
 - Increasing social supports and self esteem

By addressing mental health issues among students, schools were Impacted by:

- Lower suspension rates
- Improved attendance
- Increased focus and attention that relates to improved academic functioning
- SBHCs bill HUSKY and private insurance whenever possible, yet reimbursements support a small percentage of operational costs. There are many barriers associated with billing including: preventive and care coordination services that are not covered by insurance; high

deductibles that must be met before services are reimbursed; denial of service for mental health services; limited visits on parent's insurance plan; many services are confidential; and difficulty obtaining accurate insurance information. **We cannot sustain SBHCs with billing alone.**

Recent State Cuts to the SBHC Program:

The rescission in January 2015 reduced the FY15 budget allocation (DPH) of \$12,638,716 to \$12,048,716 – a \$590,000 (5%) cut to the entire SHC program statewide.

- The final budget for FY16-17 annualized the rescission to \$12,048,716 and cut the SHC line item by an additional \$301,218 in FY16 (to \$11.74 million).

What Cuts in Funding to SBHCs Means on the Front Lines:

- Funding reductions **impact direct services** to students by cutting hours of operation, closing sites and/or closing several weeks early, reducing clinical time and supportive/consult staff time to teachers, staff and parents. Students cannot get access to the medical and mental health services they need to remain healthy and stay in school.
- Reduction in Clinical staff time will directly result in:
 - Reduction in the number of students and families accessing and receiving needed health services
 - Increased mental health issues for students and families
 - Unaddressed health concerns for students will lead to increased disengagement, suspensions, absenteeism, and low academic performance

Please advocate for SBHCs on the State level for MORE FUNDING and NO FURTHER CUTS to the program. Our children's health and wellbeing depend on you!

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